

T h e B e s t O f

John Lee Hooker



1 9 6 5 t o 1 9 7 4

- 1 One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer 2:58
- 2 Decoration Day 5:06
- 3 Back Biters And Syndicators 2:48
- 4 Doin' The Shout 3:30
- 5 Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive 10:11
(Duet with Van Morrison)
- 6 I'm In The Mood 2:41
- 7 Mr. Lucky 2:50
- 8 I'm Bad Like Jesse James (live) 5:31
- 9 Shake It Baby 4:18
- 10 Bluebird 5:23
- 11 The Motor City Is Burning 2:48
- 12 It Serves You Right To Suffer 5:06
- 13 Think Twice Before You Go 2:01
- 14 House Rent Boogie 6:24
- 15 The Waterfront 5:18
- 16 Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang 4:44

Contains over 72 minutes of music

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A A D



Newport Folk Festival, 1964
Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee in background

1 One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded Chicago, May, 1966

Eddie Burns (guitar); remainder of personnel unknown

Produced by Ralph Bass

Originally released Chess LP 1508, "The Real Folk Blues" (1966)

2 Decoration Day

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded New York City, November 23, 1965

Milt Hinton (bass); David "Panama" Francis (drums)

Produced by Bob Thiele

Originally released Impulse LP 9103, "It Serves You Right To Suffer" (1966)

3 Back Biters And Syndicators

(Al Smith-John Lee Hooker)

Recorded Chicago, November, 1967

Louis Myers (harmonica); Eddie Kirkland (guitar); Eddie Taylor (bass); Al Duncan (drums)

Produced by Al Smith

Originally released Bluesway LP 6012, "Urban Blues" (1967)

4 Doin' The Shout

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded San Francisco, November 12, 1970

Steve Miller (guitar); Gino Skaggs (bass); Ken Swank (drums)

Produced by Bill Szymczyk and Ed Michel

Originally released ABC LP 720/2, "Endless Boogie" (1971)

5 Never Get Out Of These

Blues Alive*(with Van Morrison)*

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded San Francisco, September 28-29, 1971

Van Morrison (guitar/vocal); Robert Hooker (organ); Mark Naftalin (piano); Elvin Bishop (slide guitar); Gino Skaggs (bass); Ken Swank (drums)

Van Morrison appears courtesy of Warner Bros. Records

Produced by Ed Michel

Originally released ABC LP 736, "Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive" (1972)

6 I'm In The Mood

(John Lee Hooker-Bernard Bessman)

Recorded Chicago, May, 1966

Eddie Burns (guitar); remainder of personnel unknown

Produced by Ralph Bass

Originally released Chess LP 1508, "The Real Folk Blues" (1966)

7 Mr. Lucky

(John Lee Hooker-Al Smith)

Recorded Chicago, November, 1967

Louis Myers (harmonica); Eddie Kirkland (guitar); Eddie Taylor (bass); Al Duncan (drums)

Produced by Al Smith

Originally released Bluesway LP 6012, "Urban Blues" (1967)

8 I'm Bad Like Jesse James *(live)*

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded New York City, August 30, 1966

Otis Spann (piano); Muddy Waters, Sammy Lawhorn, Luther Johnson (guitars); Mac Arnold (bass); Francis Clay (drums)

Produced by Bob Thiele

Originally released Bluesway 6002, "Live At The Cafe Au Go Go" (1966)

9 Shake It Baby

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded New York City, November 23, 1965

Barry Galbraith (guitar); Milt Hinton (bass); David "Panama" Francis (drums)

Produced by Bob Thiele

Originally released Impulse LP 9103, "It Serves You Right To Suffer" (1966)

10 Bluebird

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded Sausalito, CA, May 22, 1974

Greg Adams (trumpet); Mic Gillette (trumpet/trombone); Emilio Castillo, Lenny Pickett (tenor sax); Steve Kupka (baritone sax); Clifford Coulter (Hohner clavinet, electric piano, Moog bass); Hollywood Fats, Jim Kahr (guitar); Ken Swank (drums)

Produced by Ed Michel

Originally released ABC LP 838, "Free Beer And Chicken" (1974)

11 The Motor City Is Burning

(Al Smith)

Recorded Chicago, September 26, 1967

Wayne Bennett (guitar); Phil Upchurch, Eddie Taylor (bass); Al Duncan (drums)

Produced by Al Smith

Originally released Bluesway LP 6012, "Urban Blues" (1967)

12 It Serves You Right To Suffer

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded New York City, November 23, 1965

Barry Galbraith (guitar); Milt Hinton (bass); David "Panama"

Francis (drums)

Produced by Bob Thiele

Originally released Impulse LP 9103, "It Serves You Right To Suffer" (1966)

13 Think Twice Before You Go

(Al Smith)

Recorded Chicago, November, 1967

Louis Myers (harmonica); Eddie Kirkland (guitar); Eddie Taylor (bass); Al Duncan (drums)

Produced by Al Smith

Originally released Bluesway LP 6012, "Urban Blues" (1967)

14 House Rent Boogie

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded San Francisco, November 12, 1970

Dave Barger (harmonica); Mark Naftalin (piano); Steve Miller, Dan Alexander (guitar); Gino Skaggs (bass); Ken Swank (drums)

Produced by Bill Szymczyk and Ed Michel

Originally released ABC LP 720/2, "Endless Boogie" (1971)

15 The Waterfront

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded Chicago, May, 1966

Produced by Ralph Bass

Originally released Chess LP 1508, "The Real Folk Blues" (1966)

16 Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang

(John Lee Hooker)

Recorded Los Angeles, May 29, 1969

Jeff Carp (harmonica); Johnny "Big Moose" Walker (keyboards); Paul Ashell (guitar); Gino Skaggs (bass); Roosevelt Shaw (drums)

Produced by Ed Michel

Originally released Bluesway LP 6038, "If You Miss 'Im...I Got 'Im" (1969 or 1970)

JOHN LEE HOOKER - guitar and vocals (*all tracks*)

Compiled by Dave "Daddy Cool" Booth

Reissue Producer: Andy McKaie

Art Direction: Vartan

Design: Larry Vigon & Brian Jackson

Photos: David Gahr

Digitally remastered from the original Chess, ABC, Bluesway and Impulse masters by Robert Stoughton, MCA Studios, No. Hollywood, CA

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During the late '60s and early '70s, John Lee Hooker was shuttling between black nightspots and white folk clubs with an occasional overseas junket for a change of pace. Could he ever in his wildest dreams have imagined that twenty-five years later he would be affixing gold and platinum albums to the walls of his San Francisco home?

Along with the income of the superstar, Hooker has acquired their argot. "They're my friends, and I love them," he says of his fellow superstars who play with him on his new albums. Needless to say, it wasn't always that way.

During his overseas trips in the early '60s, John Lee Hooker was touted as one of the last of the old style bluesmen. It was a distinction that he reinforced by giving his birthdate as 1917 or earlier, thereby bracketing himself with the likes of Muddy Waters and Lightnin' Hopkins. A look back at old video, though, confirms that Hooker was probably in his early 40s while Muddy, Wolf and Lightnin' Hopkins were over 50, but in many ways his style pre-dated theirs. Modal, discursive and personalized, it harked back to a time and land where recording machines didn't exist.

The mid-to-late 1960s found Hooker and his fellow bluesmen confronted with a career dilemma. The black nightspots and bars were disowning the old sounds; airplay was rare. In the age of black pride, the blues was seen as the music of servitude. In a strange parallel development, though, white rock musicians had opened up a new market for the blues. Fans who dug the Stones and Janis Joplin, and then dug a little deeper found unvarnished blues. One corollary of this development was that the bluesman was increasingly cut off from the

audience that had not only once fed him, but had fed his music as well. When the blues began absorbing new influences in the late '60s and early '70s, they were drawn from white rock music. In the parlance of the day, blues was "happening," but at what cost?

Between 1955 and 1964 John Lee Hooker had recorded on-and-off for the Chicago-based Vee Jay label. His first fling with the ABC group of labels came late the following year when he was pacted to Impulse! for one album. Impulse! was ABC's jazz imprint, steered by Bob Thiele who had the idea of pairing Hooker with some mainstream jazzmen. It was a notion that shouldn't have worked — but it did. For some years, the resulting album, *It Serves You Right To Suffer*, was the lone standard-bearer of the blues in the Impulse! catalog. Mixed among the Hooker originals such as the title song and "Shake It Up Baby" was "Decoration Day," a blues standard first recorded by John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson in 1938.

The following May, Hooker's grand tour of the record labels brought him back to Chess, a company he had recorded for under somewhat cloudy circumstances back in 1951 and '52. Under the guidance of veteran A&R man Ralph Bass (who had brought James Brown to King Records a decade earlier), Hooker recorded two albums. One, *The Real Folk Blues*, was released almost immediately; the other, *More Real Folk Blues*, appeared in 1991.

The 'folk blues' tag was misleading; Hooker was very much plugged in and on top of his game, as "I'm In The Mood" (a revival of his number one hit from 1951) proved. Blood tests might reveal that "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer," a song

Hooker attributes to himself, had been sired by "One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer," an Amos Milburn hit from 1953, but, in Hooker's hands, it became a joyous ode to getting loaded. "The Waterfront," though, is uniquely Hooker. Rambling, free-form verses take us on an eerie journey with a disconcertingly happy ending.

Two months later, John Lee Hooker was signed to ABC's new Bluesway label, designed to do for ABC's blues artists what Impulse! had done for their jazz roster. B.B. King was moved over from the parent label, and his was the first Bluesway album; John Lee Hooker's *Live at Cafe Au Go Go* was next. In the liner notes, veteran jazz critic Stanley Dance mused on the newfound popularity of the blues among white kids. The "infantile banalities of rock 'n' roll" and the "chilly pretensions and ugly postures" of modern jazz, wrote Dance, had driven the kids to seek out realism in music. For the Go Go date, Hooker was backed by the Muddy Waters band of the day. He opened with "I'm Bad Like Jesse James," a grisly tale of retribution that got right down to the nuts-and-bolts of offing his wife's lover. The Animals, who backed him in England, quickly covered it.

It was over a year before Hooker recorded again, and when he did, he was paired with producer Al Smith for the *Urban Blues* album. Smith had begun his career as an assistant to RCA's Chicago blues chief, Lester Melrose, and, for years after that, he'd worked with Jimmy Reed (co-writing "Big Boss Man" along the way). Smith brought along Reed's longtime sidemen, guitarist Eddie Taylor and drummer Al Duncan; he also brought along a dramatic new song he'd written, "The Motor City Is

Burning," about the riots in Detroit that year. "Mr. Lucky," recently the title of Hooker's mega-gold album, also first saw light-of-day on *Urban Blues*. It's classic Hooker, although Mr. Lucky hits hard times during the break when everyone started playing against different changes.

In May, 1969, John Lee Hooker was paired with guitarist Earl Hooker. Both were from Clarksdale, Mississippi and claimed to be cousins. Sadly, Earl Hooker was already suffering from the tuberculosis that claimed him the following April. The album, *If You Miss 'im...I Got 'im*, should have been a highwater mark in the career of both men, but it was marred by Earl's insistent use of a wah-wah pedal. It dated the album worse than the harmonica player's paisley bell-bottoms. For that reason, we've included "Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang," a title that featured guitarist Paul Asbell who subbed for Earl on two cuts. The song was a minor rewrite of "Boom, Boom," Hooker's last R&B hit in 1962, and one that became a Hot 100 hit for the Animals as well as a bar band staple.

In 1970, John Lee Hooker left Motor City, his home since 1943, for California. That year, he also recorded some sessions with Canned Heat, which formed the keynote address for the *Endless Boogie* double album. Guests like Steve Miller and Jesse Ed Davis jammed with Hooker during three days of sessions. Titles like "Blues For Jimi And Janis" proved conclusively who was putting gas in the tank. Arguably, Hooker was on safer ground with "House Rent Boogie," one of those classic themes that he had reinterpreted every few years since 1950, when he had first recorded it for Modern Records.

1971's entry, *Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive*, featured more superstar guests, including Van Morrison, who did a duet with Hooker on the album's title song. Elvin Bishop sat in on guitar. The tempo on "Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive" was slow – and then some, and both singers were clearly extemporizing their lyrics as they went along. There's a strong case to be made for saying that Hooker should record as close to solo as possible, and that on an artistic – if not commercial – level guests are redundant. That said, his duets with Morrison have always been seamless. Here, the two wayward musicians established their common ground; 1991's *Mr. Lucky* picked up where they left off.

The special guests were out in force again for the *Free Beer And Chicken* set, recorded in May, 1974 with Joe Cocker, Sugar cane Harris and others dropping in. Even the Asian gongs and bells were brought out for one track to show how far producer Ed Michel was willing to go in search of a new market. Indisputably, Hooker was on more comfortable turf with "Bluebird," an immemorial blues that dated back before World War II, and one that had been recorded by John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson and Tommy McClennan, among others. Making the song uniquely his own, Hooker asks the bluebird to fly down to pimps alley in Atlanta.

ABC Records and John Lee Hooker parted company in 1974. A succession of producers had tried a barrelful of ideas, none of them entirely satisfactory. Hooker himself was becoming disillusioned. Early in 1974 he talked about giving up music and possibly opening a motel or two.

It was certainly a business he would have known from the consumer angle. He hung in there, though, to reap the success of *The Healer* and *Mr. Lucky* fifteen years later. Now he's talking about retirement again, but this time he has nothing left to prove. He's cracked the album charts wide open with his more-or-less unvarnished, primordial Mississippi music. He's played every venue from street corners to stadiums, and he's been recording continuously since 1948.

This set encompasses nine of John Lee Hooker's 40-plus years in the recording studio. It covers the critical period when he was handling the transition from a predominantly black to a predominantly white audience. Some failed ventures and miscues were inevitable, and attest to the fact that neither Hooker nor his producers always had a good idea of what tack to take. Every now and again, though, he would just settle into a John Lee Hooker groove, and everything would jell. It's surprising that it took another decade-and-a-half for someone to use that as a premise for an album.

Fans and critics alike have always tended to dismiss this period of John Lee Hooker's career, but the evidence here shows that the best of what he recorded during those years is very good indeed. "Nothing but the best – later for the rest," as Hooker himself is fond of saying. From model rambling blues to one-chord stomps, it's the essence of what John Lee Hooker's music has always been about. And if he's not living the blues any more, well, it serves somebody else right they suffer!

COLIN ESCOTT

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THE BEST OF
JOHN LEE HOOKER 1965 TO 1974

- 1 ONE BOURBON,
ONE SCOTCH,
ONE BEER
- 2 DECORATION DAY
- 3 BACK BITERS AND
SYNDICATORS
- 4 DOIN' THE SHOUT
- 5 NEVER GET OUT
OF THESE BLUES
ALIVE (With
Van Morrison)
- 6 I'M IN THE MOOD
- 7 MR. LUCKY
- 8 I'M BAD LIKE
JESSE JAMES
(Live)



- 9 SHAKE IT BABY
- 10 BLUEBIRD
- 11 THE MOTOR CITY
IS BURNING
- 12 IT SERVES YOU
RIGHT TO SUFFER
- 13 THINK TWICE
BEFORE YOU GO
- 14 HOUSE RENT
BOOGIE
- 15 THE WATERFRONT
- 16 BANG, BANG,
BANG, BANG

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